REMARKS

Claims 8-26 are pending in this application. Claims 8-26 stand rejected. Claims 8, 18 and 20 have been amended. It is respectfully submitted that no new matter has been added by the present amendment.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C § 103:

Claims 8-13 and 17-26 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Kamikawa et al. (US 6,068,002) ("Kamikawa '002) in view of Kamikawa et al. (US 6,299,696) ("Kamikawa '696) and Kamikawa et al. (US Pub. 2003/0159718) ("Kamikawa '718).

Amended claims 8, 18 and 20 recite, *inter alia*, a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate. Applicants respectfully submit that neither Kamikawa '002, Kamikawa '696, Kamikawa '718 nor any combinations thereof teaches or suggests the above claimed features.

Applicants respectfully submit that Kamikawa '002 does not disclose or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate. In contrast, the separation plate (36) of Kamikawa '002 has no opening, much less an exhaust path

connecting one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of the second openings.

Applicants respectfully submit that Kamikawa '718 does not disclose or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate. In contrast, the separation plate (72) of Kamikawa '718 has no opening, much less an exhaust path connecting one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of the second openings.

Applicants respectfully submit that Kamikawa '696 does not disclose or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate. Kamikawa '696 discloses that "[t]he shutter 7 has a bottom wall divided into four sections 50a, 50b, 50c and 50d. The sections 50a to 50d are sloped down from the periphery toward a central portion of the bottom wall. The shutter 7 also has a top wall having substantially the same configuration as the bottom wall. A drain pipe-line 56 is connected to the central portion of the shutter 7." See Col. 6, lines 45-50 of Kamikawa '696. As such, the shutter (7) of Kamikawa does not have a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, much less each of the exhaust path connecting one of the plurality of the

first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate. Indeed, in Kamikawa '696, the central portion of the shutter (7) connected to the drain-pipe line (56) is formed angularly with respect to the shutter (7) because the sections 50a to 50d of the shutter (7) are sloped down from the periphery toward the central portion of the bottom wall.

Accordingly, even assuming, *arguendo*, that the above references were combined, the combination does not disclose or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate.

Thus, claims 8, 18 and 20 are not rendered obvious by the above references. As claims 9-12, 17, 19 and 21-26 depend from claims 8, 18 and 20, respectively, they are also not rendered obvious by the above references for at least these reasons.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 8-13 and 17-26 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

Claims 14 and 15 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over '002, '718 and '696 as applied to claim 13 above and further in view of Kikuchi et al. (US 5,226,056).

As discussed above, '002, '718 and '696 do not teach or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second

openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate, as claimed in claim 8. Kikuchi, which is only directed to a method for plasma ashing a resist film, does not cure the deficiency of '002, '718 and '696 references. Based on the above, independent claim 8 is patentable over '002, '718, '696 in view of Kikuchi. Since claims 14 and 15 depend from claim 8, claims 14 and 15 are also patentable.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 14 and 15 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

Claim 16 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) as unpatentable over '002, '718 , '696 and Kikuchi as applied to claim 15 above and further in view of Drexter et al. (US 5,524,361).

As discussed above, '002, '718, '696 and Kikuchi do not teach or suggest a plurality of first openings formed in a top side of the separation plate and a plurality of second openings formed in a bottom side of the separation plate, wherein each of the exhaust path connects one of the plurality of the first openings and one of the plurality of second openings and is formed perpendicular to the separation plate, as claimed in claim 8. Drexter, which is only directed to a method of drying wood chips, does not cure the deficiency of '002, '718, '696 references and Kikuchi. Based on the above, independent claim 8 is patentable over '002, '718, '696, Kikuchi in view of Drecter. Since claim 16 depends from claim 8, claim 16 is also patentable.

Based on the arguments above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claim 16 under 35 U.S.C § 103 (a) is respectfully requested.

For the foregoing reasons, the present application is believed to be in condition for allowance. The Examiner's early and favorable action is respectfully requested. The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned if he has any questions or comments in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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